



Beech To Beech

There are over 20 miles of paths and roads in Green-Wood, but you are not obligated to remain on any of them. I recommend walking from beech tree to beech tree. Each maroon dot on the map is a beech. Once your eyes become attuned to look for their dark purple or deep green leaves and smooth pale trunks they jump out of the landscape like beacons. There are 182 beech trees in the living collection at Green-Wood. Sadly, like others in the region and beyond, they are fighting for their lives against a bark disease spread by the fungus *Phytophthora*. The largest of the trees might all be gone in a few decades, despite conservation efforts to save them. Over the years, visitors have carved up the trunks of many beeches and the deeper wounds open the trees up to further infestation by scale and fungi. Close inspection of beech tree roots reveals tiny yellow plastic inserts. These are intake valves where fungicide and insecticide solutions are injected to help stave off blight. *Fagus grandifolia* and *Fagus sylvatica* are in peril.

Artists and photographers have always admired beech trees for their smooth bark that pulls and twists like the skin of a contorting body. Many beeches have bizarre growth formations that billow out from the roots and low branches. Some beeches may stare back at you from shapes resembling human eyes. The horticultural staff has left the stumps of several beech trees throughout the cemetery to provide habitat for insects and birds while showcasing their truly monumental size. A stump near Mistletoe and Sassafras, across from Jean-Michel Basquiat's grave, has managed to push a little more life into a small cluster of leaves. Interestingly, granite and marble tombstones carved into the shape of tree stumps can be found at numerous points on the cemetery's grounds. One of the largest beech specimens grows near the corner of Crocus Path and Alder Avenue. The line of beeches nearest Fifth Avenue is showing the clearest signs of blight. At the base of most beech trees you will find the ground covered with saplings, beechnuts and spiny little husks. The nuts are edible in small quantities after roasting. And where else in the world can you say, "Meet me at the corner of Peony and Petunia," and find yourself secluded under a weeping beech tree?

Walking from beech to beech you will encounter other amazing trees. The living collection of Green-Wood has over 7,000 trees. There are a few sensational specimens like the state champion sassafras (*Sassafras albidum*) on Fountain Hill, which is also the oldest tree in Green-Wood (* on map). Another surprise is the Franklin Tree (*Franklinia alatamaha*), which is now extinct in the wild, but can be found on Cypress Avenue (** on map); it is the largest specimen in the country. A small grove of persimmon trees (*Diospyros virginiana*) growing near Crocus Path and Vista Avenue is easiest to spot in the fall when the acorn-sized fruit is bright orange.

Landmarks

Setting your course by the beech trees will expose you to the contours of the landscape in a way that can be missed from the roads or paved paths. On the earliest maps of Green-Wood most visible landforms had official place names. Although the names are inventions of the cemetery, they are remnants of early wayfinding traditions. Unfortunately, no pre-colonial place names have survived, but the landscape was particularly active. Reginald Pelham Bolton's *Indian Paths of the Great Metropolis* indicates that at least three Native American trails crossed through the landscapes of Green-Wood. One trail traversed the southern half along what is now Cypress Avenue; a second entered the landscape near the current main entrance and meandered past Sylvan Water to Dell Water before heading toward what is now Sunset Park; and a third followed the edge of Gowanus Bay before heading south into the corner of Green-Wood nearest Fourth Avenue.

The Altar to Liberty on Battle Hill is one of the most popular destinations in Green-Wood and it is only a few paces from the highest point in Brooklyn. There are nine beech trees clustered nearby. The views from this and adjacent vantage points are spectacular, sweeping south to Coney Island and the Atlantic Ocean, north to Manhattan and west to the New Jersey Highlands, over 20 miles away. This high ground is one link in a chain of hills called the Harbor Hill Moraine, which forms a continuous ridge through northern Long Island. The hills mark the terminus of the Wisconsin Glaciation. During its earliest years Green-Wood was contoured slightly to suit the needs of the cemetery, but overall it has preserved the shape and feel of this ancient landscape, including four of its seven glacial sinks. The vales, dells, mounts, hills and ridges make it easy to hide from the busy city.

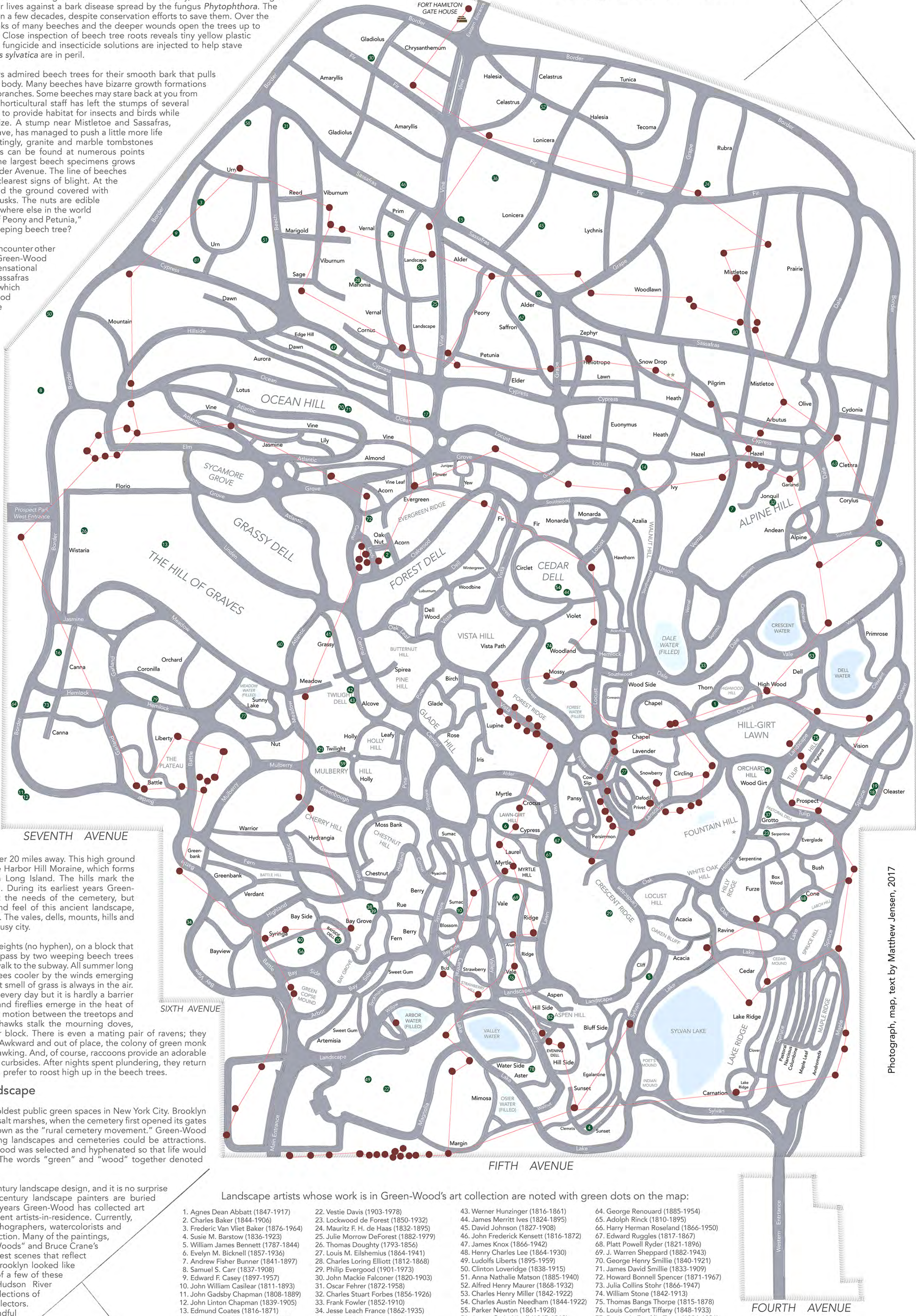
For years I have lived in Greenwood Heights (no hyphen), on a block that shares two sides with the cemetery. I pass by two weeping beech trees and a fragrant mulch pile every time I walk to the subway. All summer long the neighborhood is kept a few degrees cooler by the winds emerging from the shade of the trees. The sweet smell of grass is always in the air. I walk along the black cast-iron fence every day but it is hardly a barrier for the wildlife. Dragonflies, cicadas and fireflies emerge in the heat of midsummer. Songbirds are in constant motion between the treetops and backyards. Red-tailed and Cooper's hawks stalk the mourning doves, which outnumber the pigeons on our block. There is even a mating pair of ravens; they are often heard before they are seen. Awkward and out of place, the colony of green monk parakeets fills the air with comical squawking. And, of course, raccoons provide an adorable form of chaos on our fire escapes and curbsides. After nights spent plundering, they return to the cemetery and, for some reason, prefer to roost high up in the beech trees.

A Landscape Painter's Landscape

Green-Wood Cemetery is one of the oldest public green spaces in New York City. Brooklyn was a collection of farms, villages and salt marshes, when the cemetery first opened its gates in 1838. Its success started what is known as the "rural cemetery movement." Green-Wood proved to municipalities that sprawling landscapes and cemeteries could be attractions. As a name for the cemetery, Green-Wood was selected and hyphenated so that life would always come to mind before death. The words "green" and "wood" together denoted fresh wood, or living trees.

Green-Wood was a model for 19th-century landscape design, and it is no surprise that so many 19th- and early 20th-century landscape painters are buried throughout its rolling hills. Over the years Green-Wood has collected art and artifacts connected to its permanent artists-in-residence. Currently, the work of 82 landscape painters, lithographers, watercolorists and drawers have been added to the collection. Many of the paintings, like Susie M. Barstow's "Deep in the Woods" and Bruce Crane's "Winter View," feature pastoral or forest scenes that reflect what the landscapes in and around Brooklyn looked like in the early 19th century. The works of a few of these painters, considered part of the Hudson River School, are held in the permanent collections of renowned museums and private collectors. Most of these artists have only a handful of recorded or preserved works. The acclaimed painter Asher Brown Durand, whose painting "The Beeches" is in the collection of the Metropolitan Museum of Art, is buried at Green-Wood.

Among Trees and Stones:
Walking Green-Wood



Landscape artists whose work is in Green-Wood's art collection are noted with green dots on the map:

- | | | | |
|---|---|--|---|
| 1. Agnes Dean Abbott (1847-1917) | 22. Vestie Davis (1903-1978) | 43. Werner Hunzinger (1816-1861) | 64. George Renouard (1885-1954) |
| 2. Charles Baker (1844-1906) | 23. Lockwood de Forest (1850-1932) | 44. James Merritt Ives (1824-1895) | 65. Adolph Rinck (1810-1895) |
| 3. Frederic Van Vliet Baker (1876-1964) | 24. Mauritz F. H. de Haas (1832-1895) | 45. David Johnson (1827-1908) | 66. Harry Herman Roseland (1866-1950) |
| 4. Susie M. Barstow (1836-1923) | 25. Julie Morrow DeForest (1882-1979) | 46. John Frederick Kensett (1816-1872) | 67. Edward Ruggles (1817-1867) |
| 5. William James Bennett (1787-1844) | 26. Thomas Doughty (1793-1856) | 47. James Knox (1866-1942) | 68. Platt Powell Ryder (1821-1896) |
| 6. Evelyn M. Bicknell (1857-1936) | 27. Louis M. Eilshemius (1864-1941) | 48. Henry Charles Lee (1864-1930) | 69. J. Warren Sheppard (1882-1943) |
| 7. Andrew Fisher Bunner (1841-1897) | 28. Charles Loring Elliott (1812-1868) | 49. Ludolfs Liberts (1895-1959) | 70. George Henry Smillie (1840-1921) |
| 8. Samuel S. Carr (1837-1908) | 29. Philip Evergood (1901-1973) | 50. Clinton Loveridge (1838-1915) | 71. James David Smillie (1833-1909) |
| 9. Edward F. Casey (1897-1957) | 30. John Mackie Falconer (1820-1903) | 51. Anna Nathalie Matson (1885-1940) | 72. Howard Bonnell Spencer (1871-1967) |
| 10. John William Casilear (1811-1893) | 31. Oscar Fehrer (1872-1958) | 52. Alfred Henry Maurer (1868-1932) | 73. Julia Collins Stohr (1866-1947) |
| 11. John Gadsby Chapman (1808-1889) | 32. Charles Stuart Forbes (1856-1926) | 53. Charles Henry Miller (1842-1922) | 74. William Stone (1842-1913) |
| 12. John Linton Chapman (1839-1905) | 33. Frank Fowler (1852-1910) | 54. Charles Austin Needham (1844-1922) | 75. Thomas Bangs Thorpe (1815-1878) |
| 13. Edmund Coates (1816-1871) | 34. Jesse Leach France (1862-1935) | 55. Parker Newton (1861-1928) | 76. Louis Comfort Tiffany (1848-1933) |
| 14. Henry Ives Cobb, Jr. (1883-1974) | 35. Régis F. Gignoux (1816-1882) | 56. James Craig Nicoll (1847-1918) | 77. Benjamin Franklin Tryon (1824-1896) |
| 15. John H. Cocks (1850-1938) | 36. Thomas B. Griffin (1858-1918) | 57. Henry B. Northcote (1810-1897) | 78. James Ryder van Brunt (1820-1916) |
| 16. Henri Dele Coeuillerie (1861-1909) | 37. Gabriel Harrison (1818-1902) | 58. James Northcote (1822-1904) | 79. Hugo von Schwandenfluegel (1890-1976) |
| 17. Vincent Colyer (1825-1888) | 38. James McDougal Hart (1828-1901) | 59. Howard Notman (1881-1964) | 80. John Barnard Whittaker (1836-1926) |
| 18. Ann Brainerd Crane (1881-1948) | 39. Mary Theresa Gorsuch Hart (1829-1921) | 60. Walter Mason Oddie (1808-1865) | 81. Edmund Aylburton Willis (1808-1899) |
| 19. Bruce Crane (1857-1937) | 40. William M. Hart (1823-1894) | 61. Fanny Palmer (1812-1876) | 82. Lucy M. Durand Woodman (1829-1910) |
| 20. Nathaniel Currier (1813-1888) | 41. Arthur Hoeber (1854-1915) | 62. John Adams Parker (1827-1900) | |
| 21. Sidney Wright Curtis (1852-1926) | 42. Richard William Hubbard (1816-1888) | 63. Albert Leighton Rawson (1829-1902) | |

Photograph, map, text by Matthew Jensen, 2017